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Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and on areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the request of the Security Council contained in the statement issued by its President on 29 June 2012 (S/PRST/2012/18), in which the Council requested me to keep it informed of the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), the progress of implementation of the United Nations regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the efforts being made by missions in the region and other relevant United Nations agencies to that end. The present report provides an assessment of the major political trends in Central Africa and updates on progress in implementing the mandate of UNOCA and on efforts to counter the threat and impact of LRA, in particular the implementation of the United Nations regional strategy, since my report of 11 June 2012 (S/2012/421).

II. Major developments in Central Africa

A. Political, peace and security developments

2. During the period under review, Angola held its general elections in August and the Congo conducted parliamentary elections in July. They were held in a generally peaceful atmosphere and contentious issues were addressed through legal means.

3. A number of Central African States undertook to reform electoral institutions and legislation with a view to ensuring credible and transparent elections. In Cameroon and Gabon, electoral and constitutional reforms are under way in areas such as the functioning of national electoral commissions, the revision of electoral rolls and the introduction of biometric voter registration.

4. States continued to strengthen efforts to promote regional integration. On 25 July, the eleventh ordinary session of the Conference of Heads of State of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) was held in Brazzaville. The Presidents of the six member States (Cameroon, the Central

African Republic, Chad, the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon) were present. Pierre Moussa (Congo) was appointed President of the CEMAC Commission, replacing Antoine Ntsimi (Cameroon). Gabon was selected to hold the presidency of CEMAC for one year.

5. During the period under review, many initiatives were implemented to tackle cross-border issues, including meetings of bilateral mixed commissions and the signing of agreements on issues of common interest to the countries of the subregion. In this context, the Central African Republic and Chad, with the support of the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA), signed an agreement in September that paved the way for the voluntary repatriation to Chad of the former rebel leader of the Front populaire pour le redressement, Abdel Kader Baba Laddé, and his combatants. To strengthen regional cooperation and build confidence across State boundaries, meetings of the Cameroon and Gabon and Equatorial Guinea and Cameroon mixed commissions were held.

6. The crisis in the Sahel and the expansion of terrorist activities continued to pose serious threats to the peace, security and stability of Central Africa. The proliferation of weapons may be linked to the increase in criminal activities and poaching by heavily armed organized gangs.

B. Socioeconomic trends

7. Socioeconomic development continued to be marked by contrasting trends. On the one hand, there was strong economic growth with promising prospects. Many countries continued to attain high growth rates (above 5 per cent). On the other hand, youth unemployment and poverty rates remained high, as did the cost of living, with inflation rates in Central Africa persistently above the average for Africa.

8. Furthermore, as I underlined in my previous report (S/2012/421), a most pressing issue of concern is the fact that the good macroeconomic health in many countries in Central Africa continues to be associated with widening gaps between the rich and the poor. There is also alarmingly low progress in poverty reduction and in efforts to attain the Millennium Development Goals. This situation, if not addressed, could constitute a threat to the stability of the countries affected.

C. Human rights and gender

9. Concerns over human rights abuses in some countries remain, notably in the area of media freedom and women's rights. There is a disturbing trend in a few countries of closing down newspapers and radio stations, in particular those aligned with the political opposition. In addition, a number of journalists have been either imprisoned or intimidated by national authorities. In most countries, however, the situation of media freedom remains encouraging and the media is increasingly able to freely contribute to discourse on national issues.

10. Central Africa has the lowest participation of women and young people in decision-making positions in Africa, averaging 20 per cent. Notable exceptions are Rwanda and Burundi, where women make up 56 per cent and 32 per cent,

respectively, of parliamentarians. There is a need to intensify advocacy so that Governments respond to their international commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security and the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women.

11. Women and girls have continued to suffer from a high incidence of female genital mutilation, early forced marriage, denial of the right to education and the generally poor socioeconomic situation of widows. Other challenges include high rates of maternal mortality in Chad (1,500 per 100,000 live births), Burundi (1,100 per 100,000 live births), the Central African Republic (980 per 100,000 live births) and Rwanda (750 per 100,000 live births).

III. Activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa

A. Enhancing coordination among United Nations system partners

12. UNOCA continued to implement its mandate to coordinate United Nations activities in the area of peace and security among United Nations system partners in Central Africa. In this context, it convened, from 10 to 12 October in Libreville, a second regional seminar of special representatives of the Secretary-General, United Nations resident coordinators and regional directors.

13. The meeting afforded an opportunity for the heads of the United Nations presences in Central Africa to assess the progress made in coordination and cooperation among their offices since their previous meeting, held in Libreville in October 2011. It also allowed them to map out common strategies to deliver as one United Nations, especially in dealing with new and emerging threats. Furthermore, it dealt with the evolving security situation in Central Africa, its impact on the work of the Organization and its implications for the safety of United Nations staff. The participants adopted recommendations and identified areas for further coordination among United Nations presences in Central Africa, including conflict prevention, youth employment, media freedom, sustainable development, human rights and democracy. The implementation of the recommendations will be monitored regularly.

B. Strengthening the capacity of Member States and of subregional organizations

14. UNOCA and the secretariat of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) continued to strengthen their partnership in support of regional efforts to prevent conflict and consolidate peace in the States members of ECCAS.[1] They began implementing a framework agreement on cooperation, signed in May, which highlights the following areas of cooperation: governance; electoral processes; mediation and good offices; security, including efforts to combat the

[1] The States members of ECCAS are Angola, Burundi, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Sao Tome and Principe.

proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons; and training and strengthening institutional capacity.

15. In this regard, my Special Representative and the Secretary-General of ECCAS met regularly during the reporting period to plan joint activities and discuss issues of common interest. Those meetings were followed by monthly meetings at the senior working level to discuss the practical implementation of the decisions made and to assess progress in the implementation of the framework agreement on cooperation. UNOCA initiated cooperation on mediation and good offices as a new area of work, enhanced its partnership with ECCAS with regard to security-related issues, in particular piracy and armed robbery at sea, and conducted joint advocacy initiatives with ECCAS to strengthen the regional governance framework.

16. More specifically, UNOCA and ECCAS, with the support of the Department of Political Affairs of the Secretariat, organized a workshop on mediation and facilitation of dialogue processes, held in Libreville from 12 to 14 November. The purpose of the workshop was to enhance the skills of ECCAS and UNOCA staff, identify potential entry points for further cooperation and develop a joint mediation strategy. It also afforded an opportunity to discuss the Guidance for Effective Mediation prepared by the Department and to initiate its roll-out in the region.

17. The workshop benefited from the active participation of high-level representatives of ECCAS and UNOCA. The participants recommended the elaboration of a policy framework for mediation and the establishment of a mediation mechanism in the subregion, to be developed by ECCAS with support from UNOCA and adopted by the States members of ECCAS. In addition, they requested ECCAS to identify partner institutions in its member States with a view to strengthening their mediation capacity. Lastly, UNOCA and ECCAS agreed on a joint workplan on mediation to be monitored within the framework of the regular senior-level UNOCA/ECCAS meetings.

18. With regard to security matters, UNOCA continued its collaboration with ECCAS in its capacity as secretariat of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa. ECCAS actively participates in the meetings of the Committee. For example, it prepares the analytical document that serves as the basis for discussions on the geopolitical and security situation in Central Africa.

19. UNOCA and ECCAS continued to implement joint advocacy initiatives under the framework agreement on cooperation, including a campaign to raise the awareness of the States members of ECCAS regarding their obligations under the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance. They also encouraged member States to ratify key subregional instruments, such as the Central African Convention for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons, Their Ammunition and All Parts and Components That Can Be Used for Their Manufacture, Repair and Assembly (the Kinshasa Convention). My Special Representative continued to emphasize the need to ratify this convention during his meetings with ECCAS leaders and ambassadors. He also raised the issue during his meetings with the President of Cameroon, Paul Biya, on 19 October and the President of Equatorial Guinea, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, on 11 November.

20. In addition to its cooperation with ECCAS, UNOCA strengthened its relations with other regional organizations that cover Central Africa. In this regard, it

engaged the secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region with a view to enhancing cooperation.[2] On 6 August, my Special Representative and the Executive Secretary of the International Conference signed a framework agreement on cooperation, on the margins of the extraordinary summit of the Heads of State and Government of the International Conference on the security situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, held in Kampala. They agreed to cooperate in the areas of conflict prevention, governance and mediation. A joint programme of action is being finalized with specific actions and a timeline.

21. On 2 October, my Special Representative met the President of the CEMAC Commission in Libreville. They discussed the situation in the subregion and areas of cooperation between UNOCA and CEMAC, deciding to finalize a framework agreement on cooperation between them.

22. On 10 November, my Special Representative and the President of the Confederation of African Football, Issa Hayatou, signed a framework of partnership on the use of sport, in particular football, as a tool for promoting peace and security. The Confederation supported UNOCA in organizing a football match for peace and security in Central Africa as part of the activities to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa, which are described below.

C. Preventive diplomacy and peacebuilding

23. UNOCA, in its capacity as secretariat of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee for Security Questions in Central Africa, supported the organization of the thirty-fifth ministerial meeting and the twentieth anniversary celebrations of the Committee, held in Brazzaville from 3 to 7 December.

24. During the thirty-fifth ministerial meeting, the participants discussed, among other things, the geopolitical situation in the subregion, the status of ratification of the Kinshasa Convention and other issues relating to peace and security. The twentieth anniversary was commemorated under the theme "Two decades of peacebuilding in Central Africa: contributions and perspectives of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee for Security Questions in Central Africa". A series of activities took place, including the above-mentioned football match for peace and security.

25. In partnership with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, UNOCA assisted the States members of the Committee in converting the road map for efforts to combat terrorism and for the non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons in Central Africa, adopted at their thirty-third ministerial meeting, held in Bangui in December 2011, into an operational subregional strategy.

26. More specifically, the road map focuses on strengthening relevant Customs, police, economic and social cooperation mechanisms at the national, subregional, regional and international levels. In addition, the project is intended to culminate in

[2] The States members of the International Conference are Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, the Sudan, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia.

the development of an integrated counter-terrorism and small arms and light weapons control strategy for Central Africa, which will allow concerned States to work towards the implementation of the road map, while also fulfilling relevant legal and administrative obligations set out in Security Council resolutions 1373 (2001), 1624 (2004) and 1963 (2011), in addition to the four pillars of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. As part of the process, UNOCA, in collaboration with the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, organized a workshop on 1 and 2 December, on the margins of the thirty-fifth ministerial meeting of the Committee, which brought together national focal points from each of the States members of the Committee that will be responsible for the implementation and oversight of specific counter-terrorism projects.

27. From 16 to 20 October, my Special Representative travelled to Yaoundé for meetings with national authorities, representatives of external partners and other stakeholders. During his visit, he met the President and discussed the mandate and work programme of UNOCA, security challenges facing the subregion, regional integration, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and youth unemployment. In addition, they exchanged views on the Bakassi peninsula issue and on the threat posed by Boko Haram.

28. My Special Representative also travelled to Malabo from 9 to 13 November. In his meeting with the President, he discussed issues relating to the status of the implementation of the mandate of UNOCA, piracy and armed robbery at sea and regional integration.

D. Piracy and armed robbery at sea committed in the Gulf of Guinea

29. Piracy and armed robbery at sea in the Gulf of Guinea have reached alarming proportions, with a negative impact on human, economic, social and environmental security in Central and West Africa. Illegal transnational maritime activity, in particular unregulated fishing, environmental pollution and dumping of toxic waste, exacerbates the challenges faced by regional States. The complexity of the challenges prompted the Security Council to adopt resolution 2039 (2012) on 29 February to encourage national, regional and transregional approaches to tackle maritime insecurity.

30. To address those challenges and respond to the request of the Security Council that I should support States and subregional organizations to convene a summit of Gulf of Guinea Heads of State and Government on piracy and maritime security, UNOCA facilitated a meeting of the heads of the key organizations involved in this exercise in Libreville on 31 May. It brought together the heads of the Economic Community of West African States, ECCAS, the Gulf of Guinea Commission and the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA). The participants agreed on joint actions to ensure the development of a regional strategy against piracy and other forms of maritime crime in the Gulf of Guinea and to hold a summit on the issue.

31. A technical committee in charge of the preparations for the summit met on 20 and 21 June in Abuja. It recommended that the summit should be held early in 2013. On 23 October, the steering committee on the implementation of resolution 2039 (2012) met in Libreville. It discussed the organization of a regional summit in

April 2013 in Cameroon and agreed that a ministerial meeting would take place in March 2013 in Benin.

IV. Lord's Resistance Army

A. Current situation

32. LRA continued to spread fear in remote border areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic and impede humanitarian access to displaced and host communities. Since the beginning of 2012, 180 attacks presumed to be carried out by LRA have been reported by humanitarian partners, including 42 in the Central African Republic and 138 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They resulted in the deaths of 39 civilians: 19 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 20 in the Central African Republic. A total of 193 persons have been abducted, 84 from the Central African Republic and 109 from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. One third of the abductees were children.

33. To date, some 443,000 people have been displaced from their homes in LRA-affected areas, many depending on international assistance for food, shelter, health care, water and sanitation. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an estimated 347,000 persons are displaced in Haut-Uélé and Bas-Uélé districts. In the Central African Republic, 21,000 persons are displaced, in addition to the 6,000 Congolese refugees hosted in camps in Haut-Mbomou.

34. To date in 2012, there have been no reports of alleged LRA attacks in South Sudan. The improvement in the security situation has allowed some 21,000 people to return to Yambio, Nzara, Ezo, Mundri, Maridi and Tambura counties. There remain, however, 49,000 persons displaced as a result of LRA attacks. South Sudan is also host to 18,037 Congolese and 1,143 Central African refugees.

35. While the security situation in South Sudan has improved, there is growing concern about the LRA presence in the disputed area of Kafia Kingi on the border with the Central African Republic. Sudanese refugee populations in Sam Ouandja, Central African Republic, in addition to several recent defectors, described the existence of an LRA base south of Garmadora.

B. Implementation of the regional strategy

36. UNOCA continued to coordinate efforts to tackle the threat posed by LRA, in particular the operationalization of the United Nations regional strategy to address the threat and impact of the activities of LRA, which was endorsed by the Security Council on 29 June.

37. A meeting with national, regional and international partners was held in Entebbe, Uganda, from 25 to 27 July, convened by my Special Representative to develop a joint road map for the implementation of the regional strategy. The Special Envoy of the African Union for the LRA issue, Francisco Madeira, co-chaired the meeting. The participants identified short-term, medium-term and long-term priorities, including activities that would be implemented within existing resources and those that would require additional funding. Furthermore, they agreed to convene a general coordination meeting every six months to assess progress in

the implementation of the regional strategy, in particular the five strategic objectives. In this context, UNOCA and the African Union are planning a joint resource mobilization forum to raise additional funds for the implementation of the strategy.

Strategic goal one: the African Union-led Regional Cooperation Initiative against the Lord's Resistance Army is fully operational and implemented

38. During the meeting, LRA focal points identified the operationalization of the African Union-led Regional Cooperation Initiative against LRA as an immediate priority. More specifically, it was agreed that the United Nations should encourage LRA-affected countries to provide the required troops and identify opportunities to engage the Governments of the affected countries to build a consensus on a unified approach to the LRA issue. As a next step, and on the basis of an assessment of the needs of the troops provided for the Initiative, it was agreed that the United Nations would support the African Union in mobilizing international assistance and provide assistance within existing resources.

39. During the reporting period, consensus was reached on a phased deployment in support of the Initiative. On 18 September, my Special Representative travelled to Yambio, South Sudan, to participate in a ceremony to hand over 2,000 troops from the Ugandan armed forces and 500 from the Sudanese armed forces to the Regional Task Force. Earlier, on 12 September, 360 troops from the Central African armed forces had been handed over. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has committed itself eventually to participating. Agreement on hot pursuit across borders into the Democratic Republic of the Congo has not yet been finalized, however. In addition, the 30 African Union officers currently deployed in Yambio continued to face considerable communication challenges during the reporting period.

40. From 29 October to 2 November, the United Nations Office to the African Union supported the African Union Commission in reviewing key documents for the operations of the Regional Task Force, including the concept of operations, the strategic directive, the rules of engagement and the minimum standards for the treatment of ex-combatants.

41. The documents have been submitted to the Peace and Security Commissioner of the African Union for approval and onward submission to the Joint Coordination Mechanism for final review and adoption at its next meeting, scheduled to be held in Bangui from 15 to 17 December. The Mechanism comprises the Special Envoy of the African Union for the LRA issue and the ministers of defence of the LRA-affected countries. It is chaired by the Peace and Security Commissioner of the African Union.

42. The concept of operations for the Regional Task Force should provide details about the functioning of the Force, including command and control and logistical requirements. The approval of the concept of operations by the Joint Coordination Mechanism is therefore a key factor for the United Nations to be able to determine the type of assistance that it will be able to provide, within existing resources, to the Force. It is also a requisite for the provision by the European Union of further funding support to the Force.

43. Lastly, there was also agreement at the meeting in Entebbe that there was a need to move forward on a communication and advocacy strategy, which would

include regularly sharing information with stakeholders on the progress of efforts to tackle the threat and impact of LRA activities. In this regard, the United Nations created a website that serves as a clearing house of LRA information. It produced a video to highlight the contribution of the Organization to efforts to combat LRA. In addition, UNOCA and the United Nations Office to the African Union are working with the African Union Commission to finalize a communication strategy on the Initiative. UNOCA intends to organize a meeting of African Union and United Nations public information officers to review the draft strategy in the first quarter of 2013.

44. My Special Representative continued to work with a broad range of actors on the LRA issue, including civil society and non-governmental organizations. In June, on the margins of the most recent Security Council briefing on the issue, he accepted a pledge signed by more than 3.7 million people in support of international efforts to arrest Joseph Kony and his commanders, disarm LRA and repatriate those abducted. On 17 and 18 November, he participated in a global summit on LRA organized by Invisible Children in Washington, D.C. More than 6,000 activists took part in discussions aimed at enhancing coordination and actions to effectively counter the LRA threat.

Strategic goal two: efforts to promote the protection of civilians are enhanced

45. At their meeting in Entebbe, LRA focal points agreed that there was a need to prioritize awareness-raising activities for civilian populations, in particular in the Central African Republic, and to enhance the skills and competencies of armed forces involved in counter-LRA operations in order to minimize the impact on civilian populations.

46. In the Central African Republic, BINUCA worked to enhance an inter-community early warning system that would considerably increase civilian protection. In Obo, a community-based radio station established on 17 June 2008 is broadcasting three programmes relating to defection from LRA. One of those programmes, broadcast each Monday, aims to raise the awareness of local communities about the need to support and refrain from harming LRA defectors and escapees, given the allegations that local communities have killed them in the past. During the reporting period, a non-governmental organization, Cooperazione Internazionale, provided psychological support to five LRA escapees, including three children, and facilitated their reintegration into their families of origin.

47. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has taken an integrated approach to the protection of civilians. It continued to engage with community leaders and local authorities, conduct patrols and maintain a presence in at-risk areas in order to prevent potential LRA attacks. It also trained some Congolese armed forces troops in rapid-reaction operations designed to respond to reports of LRA activity. This security framework allows international and non-governmental organizations to operate in the area to build the administrative capacity of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Training for security forces includes instruction in human rights and rule of law. Furthermore, the Mission, in collaboration with Catholic Relief Services, an international non-governmental organization, continued to implement a community alert network project aimed at enhancing local capacity in early warning in LRA-affected areas.

Lastly, it continued to support the Joint Information Operations Centre in Dungu. Formal procedures and agreements to establish formal information exchange mechanisms with the combined operations fusion centres located in Obo and Djemah, Central African Republic, and Nzara, South Sudan, are yet to be established.

Strategic goal three: current disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration activities are expanded to cover all LRA-affected areas

48. There was broad agreement among LRA focal points that there was a need to focus on the expansion of disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration activities throughout all LRA-affected areas and to develop harmonized policies and guidelines in that regard.

49. A high-level symposium on political and strategic aspects of the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration of LRA was held on 30 November in Addis Ababa. It was preceded by working-level sessions from 26 to 29 November, during which United Nations practitioners drafted guidelines, drawing on input from key partners, including the African Union, Governments and militaries of the region, BINUCA, MONUSCO and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan. These events were organized by the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Section of the Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, in collaboration with the Department of Political Affairs, thanks to a generous contribution by the Government of Germany.

50. In addition, MONUSCO and the World Bank began developing specific standard operating procedures for the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration of former LRA combatants. Such procedures will provide guidance on the extraction of LRA ex-combatants and escapees and on the process of repatriation in accordance with the mandate of MONUSCO. A second set of standard operating procedures is being developed and pertains to the sharing by MONUSCO, in accordance with its mandate, of information on disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration and its coordination with United Nations missions in the region and Regional Task Force troops.

51. With regard to defection from LRA, MONUSCO continued to carry out a range of activities to encourage the defection of LRA elements for repatriation and reintegration into their communities of origin. Disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration awareness-raising activities were conducted through, among others, local community or civil society organization radio stations to highlight the LRA threat and encourage defections. In addition, MONUSCO continued to support the expansion of regional FM radio awareness-raising networks in the LRA-affected areas. Disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration leaflets were also distributed in the LRA-affected areas jointly by BINUCA, MONUSCO and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, in collaboration with the national armed forces of the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan and the United States Africa Command.

52. Regarding assembly points for the disarmament and demobilization of former LRA combatants and escapees, MONUSCO continued to carry out Operation Welcome Peace, which was launched in February and is to be completed by

December. Plans are under way to expand this mechanism to the Central African Republic and South Sudan.

53. Field-level coordination and information sharing between United Nations missions in the region on disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration issues were also strengthened, including through the Joint Information Operations Centre in Dungu.

Strategic goal four: a coordinated humanitarian and child protection response is promoted in all LRA-affected areas

54. Two priorities were identified for this goal for the reporting period: enhancing the cross-border coordination of humanitarian response and strengthening the capacity for regional analysis of the humanitarian impact of the LRA threat.

55. In this regard, humanitarian response efforts continued to be organized mostly at the country level on the basis of needs, although cross-border initiatives increased so as to strengthen a regional response. Existing programmes cover a wide range of lifesaving services, including food, relief items, protection, medical care and agricultural tools, along with improved early warning mechanisms and economic recovery schemes. Throughout the region, the World Food Programme and several non-governmental organizations are preparing emergency responses to tackle the food insecurity of LRA-affected populations. Various organizations are also working to improve production capacity and support agricultural development and the livelihoods of smallholder farmers and communities. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and non-governmental partners continued key monitoring activities and to share information with civilian and military authorities in the areas at risk.

56. During the reporting period, cross-border information-sharing between humanitarian partners improved, in particular between the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Coordination hubs in border areas include Bunia, Dungu and Ango in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zemio in the Central African Republic and Yambio in South Sudan. Early warning systems, pioneered by the Catholic Church and supported by local non-governmental organizations, continued to be strengthened in LRA-affected areas in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Efforts are under way to establish similar structures in the Central African Republic. The system has fostered information-sharing among local communities. Cross-border discussions also regularly take place with UNHCR teams in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to assess the security situation in refugees' places of origin and the potential for repatriation.

57. Meanwhile, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) continued to issue quarterly regional updates on the humanitarian situation and response in LRA-affected areas, complemented by a regional analysis of humanitarian needs and response issued in July. Some international non-governmental organizations implemented cross-border projects in Yambio and Dungu that helped to streamline monitoring tools and improve data exchange and reaction times.

58. OCHA, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNHCR are supporting a monitoring and reporting mechanism for LRA activities in the Central

African Republic. OCHA and UNHCR have been leading a sub-working group of the mechanism in the south-east of the Central African Republic since August. It is collaborating with all non-governmental organizations in the area. OCHA and UNICEF are planning a workshop for the armed forces of the Central African Republic and Uganda in January 2013 to improve the protection of civilians in LRA-affected areas.

59. UNICEF protection focal points continued to strengthen the systematic monitoring and reporting of grave violations committed by LRA against children. UNICEF is also developing child-friendly spaces with psychosocial support and helping to reintegrate children formerly used by armed groups into their families, among other things. In Haut-Uélé and Bas-Uélé, United Nations presences and humanitarian actors, in collaboration with local non-governmental organizations, continued to provide health services, including maternal health and psychosocial support, education, water and sanitation, to displaced persons and host communities.

60. The lack of security and infrastructure continued to pose serious challenges to the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance to LRA-affected populations in remote areas. Road networks are limited, with many bridges weak and prone to collapse. In addition to significant logistical and communications constraints, insecurity and attacks on populations by both LRA and criminal groups continued to restrict humanitarian activities. Consequently, there were a number of areas where only few humanitarian organizations could travel without military escort. Meanwhile, MONUSCO completed the rehabilitation of the Dungu-Faradje, Faradje-Durba and Dungu-Duru roads, while the rehabilitation of the Dungu-Ngilima road continues.

61. Resources continued to be mobilized through country-specific appeals and agency-specific budgets. As at 5 November, the consolidated humanitarian appeals for the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan remained underfunded, at 59 per cent of the total requirements in both the Central African Republic and South Sudan and 54 per cent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Slow and inconsistent funding has led some non-governmental organizations to pull out of the area and contributed to high staff turnover and disrupted programming.

Strategic goal five: peacebuilding, human rights, rule of law and long-term development support is provided to LRA-affected Governments to enable them to establish authority across their territory

62. During the reporting period, UNHCR organized protection training sessions for civilian and military authorities in LRA-affected areas on human rights and protection of civilians. MONUSCO also carries out human rights training for non-governmental organizations, while the Uganda country office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights maintains a database that enables non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to add information on human rights abuses.

63. Central African citizens who defect, escape or are captured in an LRA-affected country are sent back to their community of origin. Meanwhile, the Central African Criminal Code establishes sanctions for the crimes listed under the section relevant to human rights abuses, such as murders, crimes against women and children and

rebellion. The issue of accountability is not raised, however, enabling perpetrators to benefit from a de facto amnesty.

64. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there are currently no plans to prosecute LRA combatants for crimes committed there. Judicial investigations, indictments and arrests are not carried out after attacks and plans for transitional justice mechanisms are lacking. This is due in part to the apparent lack of capacity in the judicial system.

65. South Sudan recently ratified the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and made its intentions to ratify human rights treaties known to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights during her visit to the country on 8 May.

66. In Uganda, the Amnesty Act of 2000, which accords amnesty to any Ugandan who renounces and abandons involvement in the war or armed rebellion, expired on 23 May. On 25 May, the Government extended the operation of the Amnesty Commission for an additional 12 months, excluding part II of the Act, which relates to the granting of amnesty. Currently, the Commission no longer has the authority to grant amnesty, although it continues to perform other functions, including facilitating the reintegration of ex-combatants and returnees into local communities.

67. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in collaboration with the Uganda Human Rights Commission, led consultations on the reparation of victims in northern Uganda. Its findings were published in a report entitled "The dust has not yet settled: victims' views on the right to remedy and reparation" in February. It is expected that the policy recommendations arising therefrom will inform the reparations component of the national transitional justice policy.

V. Observations and recommendations

68. Elections are sometimes a source of tension and could also lead to violence. I am encouraged that Central African States are continuing to work on reforming their electoral laws to promote transparency and inclusiveness in the electoral process. UNOCA and the United Nations presences in the subregion stand ready to support those efforts.

69. It is notable that Central African States are continuing to work together to tackle cross-border challenges. I encourage them to continue to strengthen their partnerships and to adopt effective mechanisms to manage cross-border movements of people and goods. I also encourage them to promote peacebuilding initiatives across their shared borders as a way of fostering long-term, sustainable development.

70. I am encouraged by the continued robust economic growth rates recorded during the past year. Impressive growth rates need to translate into tangible results for the majority of the people in the subregion, however. Regional leaders and policymakers should step up their efforts to pursue economic policies that are inclusive and that ensure that national wealth is shared equitably. As we approach the 2015 deadline, I urge the countries of the subregion to redouble their efforts to attain the Millennium Development Goals.

71. I am gravely concerned at the high rate of youth unemployment in Central Africa. UNOCA and other United Nations system partners will continue to raise the awareness of national authorities as to the need to urgently tackle this issue and to support efforts to put effective policies in place.

72. Violence against women continues to pose serious problems, with cases of rape and the application of harmful traditional practices. I encourage States to live up to their commitment to achieve gender equality, women's empowerment and full respect for the human rights of women.

73. I am concerned by the growing threats to the personal security of United Nations staff members in the subregion, where, during the reporting period, some were attacked and others killed while carrying out their duties. I urge all States to support the United Nations presences in their countries to fully implement the recommendations adopted at the subregional meeting organized by UNOCA.

74. Strengthening the capacity of subregional organizations is a priority for UNOCA. My Special Representative has made significant progress in establishing partnerships with relevant entities, including the Confederation of African Football, CEMAC, ECCAS and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. UNOCA will continue to strengthen those relationships and ensure the implementation of the cooperation agreements signed with those entities.

75. Maritime insecurity and piracy in the Gulf of Guinea remain a growing threat to peace, security and economic development. I commend the continuing collaboration between the Gulf of Guinea Commission, ECCAS and the Economic Community of West African States, with support from UNOCA and UNOWA, to implement the recommendations made by the Security Council in its resolution 2018 (2011). I welcome the conclusions of the joint meeting of the Gulf of Guinea Commission, ECCAS, the Economic Community of West African States, UNOCA and UNOWA, held in Libreville on 22 and 23 October, including a recommendation that a ministerial meeting on the Gulf of Guinea be held in February 2013, followed by a summit of Heads of State and Government in April. UNOCA and UNOWA will continue to support efforts to convene those important meetings.

76. I am encouraged by the progress made in tackling the threat and impact of LRA since the adoption of the United Nations regional strategy in that regard. Priorities have been identified to maximize the effectiveness of collective interventions. Coordination has been strengthened among the United Nations presences and between United Nations presences and other actors, in particular the African Union. The development of regional standard operating procedures on disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration was a significant achievement. I commend the African Union on its efforts to make the Regional Task Force operational. I encourage the LRA-affected countries, with assistance from the international community, to provide the support necessary for the full deployment of the Force. I commend the engagement of non-governmental organizations, which have remained important partners in efforts to take on the LRA threat. I urge the international community to maintain its attention to the LRA issue and to provide the financial support needed by the African Union and the United Nations to continue their work.

77. In conclusion, I should like to express my appreciation to the Governments of the Central African countries, ECCAS, the African Union, the Gulf of Guinea

Commission, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other subregional and regional institutions for their close and continued cooperation with UNOCA. I thank the various entities within the United Nations system working in Central Africa, including the heads of United Nations peace operations, regional offices, country teams and other relevant entities, for their support for and cooperation with UNOCA. Lastly, I should like to express my appreciation to my Special Representative and the staff of UNOCA, in addition to the members of the United Nations country team in Gabon, for their continued efforts to advance peace and security in Central Africa.